



Office of Developmental Primary Care

Improving outcomes for people with developmental disabilities

Communication Simulation Exercise: Tools for Trainers

Objectives

1. Demonstrate appropriate exam room etiquette when working with someone with a developmental disability including using respectful terminology, interacting directly with the patient, and including the patient in the conversation.
2. Identify tools to facilitate communication with patients with DD and respond appropriately to communication barriers that may arise when working with someone with a DD.
3. Elicit needs and preferences of patients, families, and caregivers in their interactions with the health care system.
4. Demonstrate skills in interviewing patients with DD, their families and caregivers.

Activity

Pair students. Student #1 will play the role of a person with functional limitations in vision, speech, and use of arms. Student #2 will be their communication partner. Student #1 is given a sentence to communicate to Student #2. Student #1 should keep their eyes closed, clasp their hands behind their back, and remain silent while communicating. Students will have three minutes to complete the task. Following the exercise, participants will discuss their experiences.

Sample Sentences

- Where is the bathroom?
- I feel sad because of family problems.
- I have a tingling in my right ear.
- I've had chest pain on and off during exercise.
- I've been hearing voices that other people don't hear.
- My medicine makes my stomach hurt.
- I want to be tested for sexually transmitted infections.

Materials

- Sentence strips

Thought Questions

- How did it feel to try to communicate?
- What strategies did you use to communicate?
- Was any behavior misinterpreted?
- What would have made communication easier?
- How did your communication partner get your attention?
- What behaviors in your communication partner were most helpful?

Teaching Tips

- Communication is a two-way street. The actions of the partner who is receiving a message are as important as those of the person who is trying to express themselves.
- When behavior is used to communicate, it can often be misinterpreted. It can even look aggressive.
- Playing twenty questions is helpful, especially to get on the right topic. A helpful way to play 20 questions is to break a concept into separate simple questions: who, what, where, when, and how.
- Closed-ended questions are more helpful than open-ended questions.

Revised: 11.19.13